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RR RUEHMR
DE RUCNDT #0228/01 0801408
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 211408Z MAR 07 ZDK
FM USMISSION USUN NEW YORK
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 1565
INFO RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN 0802
RUEHMR/AMEMBASSY MASERU 0026
RUEHSA/AMEMBASSY PRETORIA 0743
RUEHSN/AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR 0132
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 2601
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 USUN NEW YORK 000228

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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [SOCI](#) [KWMN](#) [UN](#) [CSW](#)

SUBJECT: UN COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN 2007 SESSION

REF: A. STATE 30182

[1](#)B. STATE 30271

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[1](#)1. (U) Summary: The UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) held its 51st session from February 26 to March 9, [1](#)2007. Permanent Representative of El Salvador, Carmen Maria Gallardo Hernandez, chaired the session, whose main theme was "The Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination and Violence Against the Girl Child." The US hosted a panel discussion on state-sanctioned rape in Sudan and Burma. Discussions and panels considered, among other things, women's empowerment, creating stronger laws, and engaging men and boys to address the main theme of the session. US priorities were the problems of forced and early marriage and prenatal sex-selection and female infanticide. The Commission adopted resolutions on forced marriage of the girl child, female genital mutilation, HIV/AIDS, and Palestinian women. The Commission also adopted Agreed Conclusions. End Summary.

Commission Adopts Four Resolutions and Agreed Conclusions

[1](#)2. (U) The Commission's outcome was the adoption of Agreed Conclusions and four resolutions on February 9. The USDel chaired negotiations of the resolution entitled "Forced Marriage of the Girl Child." After week-long contentious discussions led to consensus on the text, the EU submitted an amendment from the floor reaffirming the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CROC), and The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. In reaction to the EU amendments, the USDel withdrew co-sponsorship of the resolution (Ref A). El Salvador, Panama, Cote D'Ivoire, Togo, Benin, Mali, Angola and Congo continued to co-sponsor the resolution, which was adopted by consensus. A resolution co-sponsored by the USDel on "Prenatal Sex Selection and Female Infanticide" was withdrawn and language on these topics was incorporated in the Agreed Conclusions, as well as into the resolution on forced marriage.

[1](#)3. (U) Pakistan on behalf of the Group of 77 and China sponsored a resolution entitled "Situation of and Assistance to Palestinian Women." US and Canada voted "no" on this resolution, which was adopted by a vote of 40-2(US)-0. Israel, Canada and the USDel made statements explaining that the resolution had unbalanced and negative political undertones. The EU representative contended they could support the resolution because it was humanitarian in nature. The Commission adopted other resolutions by consensus, including "Ending Female Genital Mutilation," sponsored by

South Africa on behalf of the Africa Group, and "Women, the Girl Child and HIV/AIDS" sponsored by Lesotho on behalf of the Southern Africa Development Community.

14. (U) The Commission adopted Agreed Conclusions after trimming a draft document, that at one time reached 30 pages, back down to a manageable length. In the process, language on prenatal sex selection and female infanticide, introduced from the withdrawn US resolution, was reduced. The EU blocked the reference to "sex-selective abortion" with support from New Zealand and Canada. China did not block the "abortion" reference; their concern was to block language on the serious societal repercussions resulting from prenatal sex-selection and female infanticide. Delegations agreed to the phrase "prenatal sex-selection" instead of sex-selective abortion and reduced the mentions of the social repercussions. Several references to sexual and reproductive health remained, as did reaffirmation of the Beijing Platform for Action and a reference to "foreign occupation." The USDel made an Explanation of Position on the Agreed Conclusions per Ref B.

US Hosts Panel on Mass Rape

15. (U) On February 8, the US hosted a well attended panel on State Sanctioned Mass Rape in Sudan and Burma. Dr. Jennifer Leaning of the Harvard School of Public Health described how mass rape, used as a weapon of war, differs from other rape during conflicts in its systematic nature and its intention to humiliate, neutralize or exterminate a specific group of people. Omer Ismail, from Sudan who is now a fellow at Harvard, confirmed that mass rape is being used to achieve political aims in Sudan. Two representatives from Burmese NGOs described the situation in Burma and how the "Myanmar" junta continues to use acts of mass rape to systematically

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oppress minority groups. A representative of the Government of Sudan intervened and circulated a statement that warned, "Those in glass houses should not throw stones." US Ambassador Grover Joseph Rees concluded the discussion by asserting that when countries stop allowing mass rape as a weapon of war, the US will stop hosting panels that highlight human rights abuses of specific countries.

Keynote Speaker Acknowledges Progress and Challenges

16. (U) UN Deputy Secretary-General Asha-Rose Migiro (Tanzania) delivered the keynote address to the 51st Session of CSW on February 26. Migiro stressed that CEDAW and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action provide important groundwork for the progress of gender equality. To address continuing violence against women and girls, Migiro called for rejection of violence, implementation of legal norms, prosecution of perpetrators, dedication of sufficient resources and full engagement of men and boys. She concluded by affirming the Secretary-General's commitment to replace several current structures with one UN entity focused on gender equality and women's empowerment.

General Discussion Commences with Empowerment of Women

17. (U) On February 28, the Commission discussed the crucial role of women's empowerment in reducing poverty, disease and discrimination. The Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Gender Issues and the Advancement of Women reported that violence against women and girls is increasing. The Executive Director of the UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) argued that normative standards needed institutional support and resources to be effectively implemented and monitored. The Director of the United Nations International Research and Training Institute of Women (INSTRAW) noted that women must have access to education and financial resources

and must be included in government and community decision-making. A representative of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues made the case that more disaggregated data is necessary to adequately understand the situation of violence and discrimination against girls.

Commission Considers Legal Strategies to Combat Violence

¶8. (U) On March 1, the Commission discussed how a robust set of laws would bolster the well-being of girls. Since discrimination and violence against girls can take many forms, legislative action must cover a variety of areas such as combating trafficking, registering offenders, rehabilitating victims and criminalizing the exchange of exploitative images of children on the internet. The Director of the Institute for Gender, Law and Development pointed out recent legislative advances in Latin America that further protect women, expand the definition of discrimination, punish perpetrators and enhance victims' assistance and prevention schemes. Participants called for a unified global strategy regarding international issues like trafficking in persons. Finally, the Executive Director of UNIFEM described the discrepancy between need and funding by stating that requests in 2006 totaled \$119 million but only \$2.5 million was available to fund programs combating violence against women.

Commission Calls for Engagement of Men and Boys

¶9. (U) The Commission had a general debate and panel discussion March 2 on the issue of involving males in fighting discrimination and violence against women and girls. Many speakers stressed that discrimination was not innate but learned and that ending discrimination would require teaching boys at an early age to respect women and girls. Gender sensitivity in school curricula has not been taken seriously enough, but efforts to encourage responsible sexual behavior have successfully increased the use of contraception and voluntary testing for sexually transmitted infections. Although partnerships with men have proven to be fruitful, challenges remain regarding incorporation of men because male peers, at times, can ridicule men who stand up for women's rights.

Secretary-General Recognizes International Women's Day

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¶10. (U) UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon addressed the Commission on International Women's Day, March 8. While he acknowledged that there are international standards and laws to help eliminate violence against women, the SG urged a move towards concrete actions. He encouraged partnerships aimed at promoting greater access to education, closer adherence of practice to laws, deepened understanding of violence, incorporation of all parts of society and allocation of adequate resources. The SG concluded by outlining tangible steps the UN can take to combat violence against women, such as the General Assembly devoting an annual agenda item to women and the Security Council establishing a mechanism to monitor such violence.

General Assembly Convenes Women's Empowerment Session

¶11. (U) In the same spirit of the CSW, which is a commission of ECOSOC, the GA held a separate event on March 6 and 7 that included a high-level debate and panel discussions regarding women's empowerment, including microfinance and political participation. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon opened the session by stating that only by fully empowering and engaging

women is it possible to surmount current global challenges. US Under-Secretary Paula Dobriansky stressed the important role of women in building a prosperous and peaceful future and highlighted tangible progress like the Africa Education Initiative and the Middle East Partnership Initiative. US Ambassador Shirin Tahir-Kheli, Senior Advisor to the Secretary of State for Women's Empowerment, also participated

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in the debate.
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